



**Oadby & Wigston**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

**Tell Us. Have your say and Be Heard. Share your ideas. We are listening.**

**Report Back from three consultation questions by respondees of South Wigston Residents Forum**

**Date: October 13<sup>th</sup> 2017**

From 24 cards distributed at the Residents Forum on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2017, 3 responses were received. The contents of the responses are added here for feedback at the Residents forum to be held on October 8<sup>th</sup> 2017.

The contents represent the actual stated words of the three residents who responded.

**1. How is your Forum working for you ?**

**Answer:**

Not including whole of community. Meetings do not need presentations unless relevant to the topic. Meetings not in interest of residents.

**2. What could your Forum be doing differently?**

**Answer:**

More inclusive Agenda with topics residents want to talk about.

No mobile phones

Councillors to listen to residents.

Money in fund ( Forum) needs to be accountable before being granted and afterwards.

**What more could your Forum do to make it more accessible to more residents?**

**Answer:**

Publicise.

Make meetings more where people will be listened to and feedback given.

### **How is your Forum currently working for you?**

It is not working. The Forum has become a propaganda and public relations exercise for the Council and the Liberal Democrats.

Nothing of importance has been brought voluntarily to the Forum for many years.

The residents are seen as a captive audience to which information is given and from which no involvement is needed. This consultation exercise is an example of the lack of understanding between councillors and residents. The yellow sheet looks as if it has been produced by a GCSE student in a hurry. The consultation time is ridiculously short. The amount of open discussion almost nil. That Wigston Forum has had five returns says it all.

There is no dynamism in the Forums. This is largely because serious debate is not encouraged, and large issues are ignored. No votes are taken, so councillors cannot be held to account. They are only too happy to take away the 'mood' of the meeting. This usually results in nothing being done.

The constant power point presentations of issues upon which residents can have no effect have led to a fall in attendance.

### **What could your Forum be doing differently?**

Fulfilling its terms of reference. These should not, under any pretext, be changed.

By fulfilling those terms the Forum would become an open, active arena for citizen participation. This should be seen as a positive opportunity.

Discussing issues of importance and relevance to residents, and genuinely seeking and acting upon their views. Brocks' Hill is an example. The plan was accepted before residents were asked to comment.

Stop using the Forums as an easy means to tick a required national or local consultation box. The Defra consultation is an example. Residents had to sit through 40 minutes of a presentation, but could have no impact or affect on what was before them. Why should residents turn up to have their time taken with something they cannot affect or change? Discuss things residents can influence, or will be of use to them.

Take clear votes on issues and record them. Councillors have consistently kept decision making vague. The result is nothing is carried through, and no one can point to what was actually agreed or decided.

Voting means keeping proper records. This means taking accurate minutes. The present minutes in all three Forums are unsatisfactory. It may be time to employ a professional minute taker. The present monies paid to Forum Chairs is excessive to the work

required. Half of this should be used to employ a professional minute taker for all Forums.

The minutes should also properly reflect the mood of the meetings – including recording criticism of the Council, and elected members. To date, any criticism of the Council has not appeared in the minutes, unless challenged under amendments. This is unhealthy. It's a form of censorship.

Putting a proper funding system in place:

- The original Forums didn't allocate money
- Applications should be reduced and carefully defined
- All applications should be submitted in writing
- All applications should account for spending and return unused funds.
- Any application refused should not be passed by the back door of the Policy, Finance and Development Committee.

Having relevant officers, including the CEO, attend the Forum to answer questions more often.

### **What could your Forum do to make it more accessible to residents?**

Discuss important issues.

Have the agenda set by residents and the Chair.

Take votes on issues.

Keep proper minutes with votes recorded and criticism of the Council included.

Build the Forum around simple psychological principles. Organisations need three ostensibly simple steps to make them effective.

Purpose: What is the organisation for?

Mastery: The members propose and decide. They then expect decisions to be moved forward. The means of action are known to all and clearly defined. In the case of the Forum, the organisation should be owned by the residents.

Feedback: Decisions are acted upon and the results fed back. Here, residents can then understand what has happened and why. People can see the results of decisions and reflect upon them. This will inform future decisions.

Bring topics of interest and importance to residents e.g. why do people cycle on pavements, and how do we live with this.

Bring the large issues facing the local authority into the Forum e.g. the impact the ending of central government funding to local authorities will have in 2020.

## **How is your Forum currently working for you?**

The terms of reference are brilliant and shouldn't be changed.

Unfortunately the wealth of opportunity offered by the terms of reference haven't been fulfilled for some considerable time. This has been due to:

- Top down agenda planning and style of chairing
- Too many presentations
- Not enough time to talk about issues of importance to residents – because it's squeezed out to the end, or has to be wrestled back from a packed agenda.
- The Forum is supposed to give residents a greater say in Council decisions. But mostly residents don't hear about issues and decisions which may affect them until it's too late.
- Very poor follow up on issues with limited reporting back of whether things have been resolved. Councillors tend to either say something can't be done, or say they'll take an issue back - but with no outcome or follow up. It seems to be like a black box.
- Poor governance of Forum funding – minimal requirements for properly presented plans and costings at application stage; no apparent checking or oversight by named officers in finance; poor or non-existent monitoring, review and reporting.

## **What could your Forum be doing differently?**

Lots of time at the beginning of each meeting for residents to discuss issues that are important to them. Much more open style of chairing to facilitate discussion.

Far fewer presentations – residents' time shouldn't be taken so the Council can tick a 'consultation' box or do PR.

Be much more open about current issues the Council needs to decide about and have open discussion about them in the Forum. Residents could be more up to date with possible changes or spending decisions. And Councillors could hear wider views about how proposals might affect their constituents. E.g. How would residents feel about the possible closure of public toilets?

Examples of issues which could be discussed early in the process might include:

- Options for saving money
- Options for major developments and the likely costs
- Significant planning proposals – (It is fully understood that Councillors cannot give a view before any decision, but that doesn't preclude outlining proposals in order to hear residents' views.)
- Much greater openness as early as possible about any difficulties the Council is facing
- Honesty about mistakes or fallibility

More explicit use of working groups. Needs to be a focus on making a difference. That could be to work more closely on trying to solve a local problem, or to bring about completion of a project to benefit the area. Councillors and residents working together might help achieve an outcome more

promptly than the current pattern of issues being 'taken back'. Collaboration would be an important part of residents being more involved.

Need for much more robust system for every stage of funding to local groups – proper proposals and costings; oversight by named officer in finance; submission of accounts; monitoring, review and reporting during grant period and at conclusion of project.

**What more could your Forum do to make it more accessible to more residents?**

Fewer presentations: they make people feel they're a 'captive audience' and unable to respond – so they end up staying away out of boredom.

Actions to be taken and reported back far more swiftly. That would help people feel that being involved is worthwhile if it helps things to improve.

Have a working group in each Forum to plan specific ways to increase attendance. That has to include that the Forum itself is set to work more effectively as above.